



FEMA

STRENGTHENING DISASTER RECOVERY FOR THE NATION



Strengthening Disaster Recovery for the Nation

VIDEO TELECONFERENCE (VTC)

Region VII VTC

Time: October 29, 2009, Thursday, 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM (Central)

Participating Locations: FEMA Region VII, Iowa,
Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska

Participation Via: VTCs, phone bridge (only) and participating through WebEx

Sectors Represented: Federal and State agencies, nonprofits and private sector and Tribal representation

Note: This product is provided as a general summary only, not a transcript of the discussion.

Region VII VTC Summary

Kansas City, Kansas

October 29, 2009

Sixteen (16) questions were presented to those participating in the VTC process for comment. Region VII used a group discussion to address all but one (1). Responses to Q16 were directed to the Web site. To begin the conversation, Facilitators asked for volunteers from different backgrounds to provide the first response. All questions except Q16 were addressed. Region VII responses are below.

PARTICIPANT COMMENTS

NOTE: Responses are by questions posed and are noted using the original sequencing.

Q1: How would you define a successful disaster recovery?

- When thinking about defining successful recoveries, participants in the Region VII VTC want to see:
 - The **tax base, critical functions** and **activities** reestablished.
 - **Mitigation** included in recovery initiatives and improvement in recovery.
 - **Infrastructure restored** and **access given back** to the community.
 - A focus on **preparedness**.
 - And, a “**strike while the iron is hot**” approach.
- Participants think successful recoveries should include planning and restoring in addition to mitigating.

Q2: Are there clear phases in the disaster recovery process that are useful milestones?

- Participants said there is an initial “**we can do it**” phase, followed by **frustration** as the process goes forward.
- They also said communities **begin planning recovery during response** and there are physical and emotional phases to recovery as well as sequential steps. They described the continuum as:
 - One phase beginning **as help starts to leave**; FEMA needs to maintain local help during this phase.
 - Another is the **decision-making process**.
 - Another is **getting people back into their homes** and working through where to locate people who have no home.
 - And another is the **community coming together** to address basic recovery issues.

- Participants also discussed recovery **phases for specific recovery sectors**. For example: **Housing, infrastructure** and **business operations** have their own recovery phases that are likely to be different.
- Participants want to see:
 - Communities and recovery leadership to **plan more and react less**.
 - Volunteers involved during actions **early on** so they are already in place after Federal (and State) agency support leaves.
 - Better-defined recovery milestones and **milestones** defined from the **country perspective** and **specific to local communities**.
- Just as there can be different phases for specific recovery sectors, there are “**very different layers**” of planning for **homeowners, businesses** and **cities** and **municipalities**.
- While not a phase or a milestone, participants noted the importance of communications strategies that address all **cultures** and **languages, recognizing cultural differences**.

Q3: What features of Federal disaster recovery assistance are most important to you?

- Responses to this question ranged from the individual assistance and process perspectives to funding and more. Participants identified features important to them and noted that more work is needed for each. More specifically participants said:

INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE PERSPECTIVE

- Disaster case management needs improvement.
- Crisis counseling is needed for long-term recovery.
- Cultural issues need attention.
- More mental health resources are needed as well as resources for nonprofits who provide mental health services.
- And programs are needed for the elderly.

PROCESS

- Participants expressed concern about the **reversal of reimbursement activities after approval**.

FUNDING + RESOURCES

- Participants said that Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are **positive**. More importantly they are **flexible**. Participants said CDBG funds help meet needs and **address gaps** in recovery support.
- They also said recovery leadership and stakeholders need to **know upfront** what assistance is available.
- Participants said it is important to acknowledge Tribal sovereignty during recovery assistance.

Q4: How would you measure progress and what specific metrics should be considered for a successful disaster recovery?

- When addressing measurements and metrics, participants commented on specific actions that can be **tracked** and **quantified**, the importance of identifying **gaps** and identified some **tools** that could be used to measure progress. More specifically:

METRICS

- Region VII participants said progress can be measured by tracking the numbers of:
 - People moving from **temporary to permanent** housing units.
 - “Dollars out the door.”
 - Applications *not* approved.
 - Vulnerable citizens being served by community-based services.

GAPS IDENTIFIED

- Participants recognized the importance of **identifying gaps** needing attention so that unmet needs are better defined and addressed. They expressed that better defined needs make more accurate measurements possible.

MEASUREMENT TOOLS

- When developing measurement strategies and tools, participants want to see **information shared, avoiding duplicative efforts**.
 - Participants realize that sharing of records will require client consent to release information but said that sharing aggregate information if detailed information is not available can still be useful.
- They suggested a **questionnaire** to gauge how the community measures success.

Q5: What are best practices in managing recovery from disasters?

- Participants identified seven (7) issues that when addressed can improve recovery management:
 - **Consistency** in program **regulations** and program **interpretations** (from Public Assistance (PA) coordinators and others) is needed to better manage recovery.
 - **Learning** from failures become tools for future best practices.
 - Identifying a **State volunteer liaison** pre-disaster so ready to go when disasters hit.
 - Integration of **mitigation** throughout recovery.
 - Processes and procedures that have an understanding embedded within them that the **best recovery solution may not be the cheapest**.
 - Recognition of the **importance of policy discussions** on recovery outcomes.
 - **Timing of Emergency Support Function (ESF) #14 Long-Term Community Recovery (LTCR)** to the field: *Should it be stood up earlier so that early decision making is informed by a longer-term view or should it come later once response activities have settle down?*
- Participants also noted the importance of a “**broader view**.” They feel this broader view should inform the integration of programs, and programs should be integrated once the broader view is identified and understood.

Q6: What are the appropriate State, local and Tribal roles in leading disaster recovery efforts?

- Participants discussed Tribal issues and the State role in recovery. Specifically:

TRIBAL

- Participants recognize the **unique challenges** Tribal authorities face in disaster recovery.
- Participants suggested that **non-reservation-based Tribes** need to be:
 - **Located** and **identified**.
 - **Included** in recovery planning.
 - **Incorporated** into county programs so they can receive assistance. (Health departments were the example discussed.)
- Participants also recognize the importance of **effective communications** to the Tribes.

STATE ROLE

- Region VII participants said the State role is to **support local government**.

Q7: How can the nonprofit and private sectors be better integrated into recovery?

- Participants had several ideas regarding nonprofit and private sector integration into recovery.
 - They suggest building capacities of State Voluntary Organizations in Active Disaster (VOADs) and citizen involvement to sustain momentum.
 - Revisiting the assigning of State and Federal liaisons. While liaisons are no longer identified, a local coordinator can be helpful as well.
- Participants noted:
 - The successful State **public/private partnerships** in certain states, the effort to **align with State agencies** and the creation of a **resource registry** of private sector materials, trucks, generators and other goods, services and supplies needed for response and recovery.
 - One particular state's well-integrated Red Cross that pulls agencies together for planning and field execution of programs and resources.
- They also noted the challenge of dwindling resources as needs are met.

Q8: What are best practices for community recovery planning that incorporates public input?

- Participants noted the following activities that are likely to produce public involvement in the planning process:
 - **Natural Networking** focused on:
 - Minority groups that are not interested in talking with governmental agencies.
 - **Tribal families**.
 - Other **marginal** communities.
 - Integration of community recovery planning with **other planning efforts**.
 - The use of a **visioning process** and other **planning** and **outreach tools** that invite public participation in recovery planning conversations.
 - Rely on **individual case management** contact and relationships.

- Participants also identified **communications strategies** and **tools** that facilitate and encourage public participation:
 - The use of **surveys** and **listening sessions**.
 - Outreach from **faith-based** organizations.
 - **Door-to-door** contact. Some participants feel this strategy is more effective than public meetings and encourage its use.
 - **Public meetings**.
 - Participants noted that public meetings also involve addressing **transportation** needs, **noticing, special services** and **accommodations** for special needs populations and more, to be successful.
 - Some participants' experience with public forums is that they are **typically not well attended**.
 - **Electronic** information distribution, and notices for soliciting input. However, participants stressed that the recovery leadership should not rely on the Internet. It is not always available and not used by everyone. "Low tech" strategies are needed.
 - The use of **existing interagency communications** and **coordination tools** and information distribution channels.
 - Reliance on Community Emergency Response Teams (**CERTs**), **citizen corps**, **local businesses, schools** and **others** in the community that already have an information distribution system that recovery messaging can "piggy back" onto.

Q9: How can Federal, State and local disaster planning and recovery processes and programs be best coordinated?

- Participants began this conversation by recommending that **Tribes** and **nonprofits** be included in this question.
- Coordination suggestions include:
 - Keeping **lines of communication open** with all nonprofits, the business community, elderly population, special-needs population and others who have information needs and ideas and information to share.
- Participants are mindful of the **complexity of the recovery process**. For example, comprehensive recovery planning cannot really be done until communities know the specifics of each disaster: type, location, agencies involved. However, a **framework** for recovery can be in place to guide recovery decision-making and activities. Everyone and all agencies must be committed to the structure.
- Participants echo the theme from other VTCs of the need for **early coordination** – even during response. They suggest a tiered approach:
 - **Planning** in areas (understood in this context as a larger geographical area than a single community).
 - **Visioning** targeted to each community.
 - **Liaisons** within each community.

Q10: As disaster recovery is primarily a State and local leadership issue, what are best practices for the timing (including start and end) and form of Federal assistance and coordination?

- Participants discussed forms of assistance and timing, and offered other comments to enhance recovery.

FORMS OF FEDERAL ASSISTANCE

- Participants want to see:
- Federal funding streams “mechanized” to facilitate and expedite recovery funding to State and local agencies to implement their plan.
- Conversations with Federal recovery partners so “Block Grant” formats for funding can be considered instead of funding fragmented through numerous programs.
- A more formal disaster recovery process so that everyone knows what assistance they can expect.

TIMING

- Defined start and end points.
- In terms of evaluating recovery beginning and ending points, participants asked:
 - *“How robust is the plan before the event?”* The answer to that question can be the beginning point against which response and recovery activities can be evaluated, and measurements established for determining if goals, plans and objective have been achieved (at the end).

OTHER COMMENTS

- Participants want to see these types of sessions **(the VTC meeting)** continue so that “everyone’s” **role** is defined, **relationships** are developed and **networking** is encouraged.
- Each community should **plan for the worst**.
- Tribes and communities need to be **included** in recovery planning and decision-making from the **start to finish**. Participants noted the difficulty in finding the right contact person to facilitate inclusion.
- Participants want to see more **certainty** and **consistency** in funding.

Q11: What are the greatest capacity challenges that local and State governments face in disaster recovery and what are the best practices for increasing that capacity?

- Many small municipalities do not **understand the process**. Turnover in elected officials result in **turnover (and sometimes lost)** knowledge. Participants identified/suggested:
 - A need for **education** of local officials, newly elected officials and especially in small jurisdictions.
 - Having appropriate **model ordinances** available to illustrate best practices.
 - Working through **State council of mayors** and **managers** as an educational outreach tool.
 - Participants find recovery partners sometimes have difficulty in putting the right **knowledgeable** people and Technical Assistance on the ground during disaster and Emergency Management Assistance Compacts (EMACs) are typically deployed only for the short term. Participants suggested:
 - Using **competitive contracting practices** to result in identifying and hiring the best support.
 - Develop and use **cadres**, outreach to Small Business Administration (**SBA**) and others for Technical Assistance.
 - Rely on liaisons as good non-partial representatives.

- Financial, manpower, life support and other resources are often **limited in small communities** and **Tribes**, resulting in communities and Tribes having to target elements.
- Today's **economic climate** is influencing capacity issues. State and local government budget cuts are having and negative impact.

Q12: What are best practices for marshaling Federal assistance — both financial and professional support – to support State and local efforts to recover from a disaster, and how can we work together to better leverage existing Federal grant dollars?

MARSHALING RESOURCES

- With regard to marshaling resources, participants want to see:
 - Application processes **streamlined** as a way to facilitate accessing recovery resources.
 - Interagency committees formed with leadership identified, to look at **problem solving strategies** across programs.
 - An understanding at the Federal level of the **local impact of FEMA rules** on communities. A discussion needs to occur between communities and Federal agencies.
- Each Federal agency has a different set of rules and forms. To efficiently marshal resources, **one (1) application** needs to be developed that is applicable for all programs and **one (1) set of rules** need to be developed and applied across all agencies.

LEVERAGING RESOURCES

- With regard to leveraging resources, participants said:
 - **Matching funds** with communities is a way to leverage resources.
- They also suggested:
 - **Training others in the community** when community governing bodies don't have available staff to train or assign to recovery needs.
 - And conducting **training webinars** on application and forms that need to be completed in order to receive assistance.

Q13: What unmet needs are common to most disasters that do not seem to be adequately addressed under the current systems and programs?

- Special needs of previously self-sufficient people with mental health issues during recovery who **lost their support system** after disaster. Participants pointed to **one state's programming** as an example of successfully meeting this challenge.
- **Housing.** Participants said there are a "**patchwork**" of programs. Coordinating and consolidating could facilitate access and likely speed up delivery of resources.

- **Business cash flow.**
 - Participants noted that loans may not be helpful to small businesses that had financial problems prior to the event.
 - Participants want to see assistance in forms other than loans, perhaps offering grants instead, and assistance to re-open.

Q14: What are best practices for integrating economic and environmental sustainability into recovery?

- Participants noted best practices for, and identified some challenges to, economic and environmental integration into recovery.

BEST PRACTICES

- **United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)** agricultural programs and outreach efforts working with farmers.
- **One particular city's** efforts to be a new "green" community and serving as an example to others in finding opportunity within disaster recovery.
- **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) *Smart Growth Initiative*** being brought into the recovery process.
- Broadening the role of **mitigation** planning.

CHALLENGES

- USDA has limited funds and lag in getting people on the ground to distribute resources to those who need them.
- Stakeholders —bringing resources together.

Q15: What are best practices for integrating mitigation and resilience into recovery?

- Participants noted that **pre-disaster** mitigation plans are important along with **pre-develop** mitigation projects.
- Communities need to:
 - Identify community goals **before** a disaster.
 - Understanding that not all communities will have the capabilities to do this, participants nevertheless said that communities need to **identify** and plan **off-the-shelf projects** that address likely recovery needs so they are ready when money becomes available.
 - Create **environmentally-friendly economic development** models.
- Participants want to see a **national mitigation plan** discussed.
- When considering funding for mitigation, participants want **cost and benefits** considered.
- Participants want the **role of National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)** identified in planning.

Other Comments: Participants acknowledged that:

- Some Tribes are struggling with **administrative cost caps**.
- **Local level** is where most of the work is done. Participants are encouraged to remember that when thinking about planning.